



The Lincoln Kinsman

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JAMES WRIGHT SPARROW

HIS DESCENDANTS WERE CLOSE KINSMEN OF
ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S MOTHER

A PHOTOGRAPH reproducing a pencil sketch of the Reverend Henry Sparrow, a half brother of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, the mother of the President, has just been discovered in Kentucky. Inasmuch as there is no likeness available of Mrs. Lincoln, this photograph is the only one which may approach the general characteristics of her people. Clergyman Sparrow was the oldest son of Henry Sparrow, Sr. and Lucy Shipley Hanks, the maternal grandmother of Abraham Lincoln.

James Wright Sparrow is the earliest ancestor in the Sparrow family (which intermarried with Lincoln's kinsfolk) who has thus far definitely been identified, although it is very likely that his father was Thomas Wright Sparrow who secured a land grant on Sturgeon River, Brunswick County, Virginia, in 1722. It is also possible that Thomas Wright Sparrow was a descendant of Thomas Sparrow who settled in Ann Arundel County, Maryland, in 1664, and who

had a son Thomas and a daughter Elizabeth.

There were five sons in the family of James Wright Sparrow. The family became residents of Mecklenburg County, Virginia, as early as 1765, for it was on October 9 of this year that their oldest son Henry was born in that county. It is the oldest son in whom we have particular interest.

At sixteen years of age Henry entered the Army and saw six months service in the Revolution. He enlisted at Mecklenburg Court House in the spring of 1781 and served in the company of Captain Thomas Shipp which was attached to Colonel William Mumford's Virginia Regiment.

On the commissioner's tax book for Mecklenburg County for the year 1784 we find James Wright Sparrow listing for taxation five horses and twelve head of cattle. It is evident that this was the last year of the family's residence in Mecklenburg, as the very same year James Wright Sparrow leased some land in Bed-

ford County, Virginia, as recorded on the fee book.

In Bedford County the Sparrows came in contact with the Berry, Shipley, Hanks, Mitchell, McCord, Prewitt and other well-known families of that section of Virginia. There were many intermarriages between these families. Although there are no marriage papers to confirm the wedding of James Hanks and Lucy Shipley any more than there are records to confirm the marriages of Richard Berry and Rachel Shipley, Robert Mitchell and Naomi Shipley, David McCord and Ann Shipley or Robert Sloan and Margaret Shipley, there is little doubt but that it was here in Bedford County, Virginia, in the community of the Berrys, Mitchells, McCords, Shipleys, Sloans, and Sparrows that Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln, was born. If the traditions of these associated families are to be relied upon, Lucy Hanks became a widow while in Bedford County.

There was a James Hanks living on Hatt Creek in Bedford County as early as 1783 and in 1784 he sold 150 acres of his tract to Daniel Walker. It is not known for a certainty whether or not this was the identical James Hanks whom it is claimed married Lucy Shipley, the mother of Nancy Hanks. There was a large colony of the Hankses in Bedford County.

The oldest son of James Wright Sparrow, Henry, was nineteen years of age when his family took up their residence in Bedford County and became associated with the families above named. Although the birth date of Lincoln's mother is not

known it was apparently about 1784. It was the same year that the Sparrows moved into the community where Nancy Hanks was born.

James Wright Sparrow and his family, along with the Berry, Shipley, and Hanks families, migrated to Kentucky in 1789. John Berry and his wife, Ann Mitchell Berry, settled in the same community and Edward and George Shipley took up their residence there also. Richard Berry and his wife, Rachel Shipley Berry, had proceeded them to Kentucky and, with the Caldwells and Mitchells also from Bedford County, had established a Bedford County colony on the frontier. Meanwhile some of the Shipleys who had migrated from Bedford County to North Carolina came about this time to join their relatives in Kentucky and on the way Naomi Shipley Mitchell, wife of Robert Mitchell and sister of Rachel Shipley Berry, was massacred by the Indians.

Soon after James Wright Sparrow reached Kentucky he passed away, and his noncupative will which follows was produced in the Mercer County, Kentucky, Court House on October 27, 1789:

"In the name of God, Amen, I James Sparrow of Mercer County, Caintucky, and province of Virginia, being of perfect mind and memory, do make this my last Will and Testament and dispose of what little affects God has blessed me with in Mercer following, that is to say lawful Debts to be paid faithfully discharged out of my personal Estate to my well beloved wife (Mary) I leave the rest of my personal estate to rease the childering and support herself and

my land is to be divided first One hundred for my eldest son hendry, then the other three hundred to be divided equally to the other fore sons, Thomas, James, Peter and Dinny Sparrow. This is my last will and Testament here given under my hand this 18th day of May, 1789.

"And the same was proved by the oaths of Josiah Campbell, Henry Sparrow, and Judith Sparrow and Susannah Campbell to be the non-cupative will of the said James Sparrow Deceased and ordered to be recorded."

Henry, the oldest son mentioned in the will was twenty-four years old at the time of his father's death. He inherited 100 acres of land from the 400 acre tract his father had settled. This land was adjacent to a tract of land owned by Lewis and Elizabeth Hanks, as implied from a description of the Hanks' land for which they made a deed on October 27, 1795. It is identified as a part of a 105 acre tract on Chaplin's Fork which Hanks bought from James Speed and which is about to be transferred to Jacob Minor. The description follows:

"Beginning at a sugar tree in said Minor's line at Sparrow's S. W. corner thence east with Sparrow's line 60 poles to a buckeye and beech, thence south 142 poles to a hickory at the foot of a knobb thence north 80 degrees west 60 poles to a poplar and elm, thence north 129 poles to the beginning."

There is no record of who this Lewis Hanks and his wife Elizabeth may have been, and they seem to pass out of the public records after this sale.

There are many records in the Mercer County Court to reveal how closely these former Bedford County citizens were associated in Kentucky. John Berry, the oldest son of Richard and Rachel Shipley Berry, made his will on October 8, 1795. After leaving most of his estate to his wife Ann and children, Peggy and Rachel, he added this codicil:

"Item—It is my will and pleasure that 50 acres be left to my wife Ann for the use of James B. Sparrow for his life time and his wife's, my wife first taking choice."

It is not known just what relationship existed between James B. Sparrow and his wife and John Berry but evidently they were related. It was John Berry's brother Richard who became the guardian of Nancy Hanks, stepdaughter of Henry Sparrow.

When the estate of John Berry was in process of settling, the names of Thomas Sparrow and James B. Sparrow are among those who record payments due them, and in the final report of the executors the name of Thomas Sparrow appears in two instances along with the name of Edward Shipley and Robert Mitchell who married Naomi Shipley.

Several documents associated with the wedding of Henry Sparrow and Lucy Shipley Hanks are available:

(1) A certificate signed by the prospective bride stating that she is of age and witnessed by John Berry, son of Rachel Shipley Berry and Robert Mitchell, husband of Naomi Shipley Mitchell.

(2) A certificate signed by John Daniel who married Biddie Sparrow, certifying that Lucy Hanks is of age.

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(3) A marriage bond signed by Henry Sparrow, the prospective bridegroom, and John Daniel.

(4) The marriage returns of the minister, John Bailey, who certified that he married the couple on April 30, 1790.

As early as 1794 Henry Sparrow's name is found on the Mercer County Commissioner's Book. He listed for taxation three horses and eight cattle. On the same book appears the names of James B. Sparrow, Thomas Sparrow, and Mary Sparrow. As the tithe lists of both Thomas and Mary were taken on the same day, April 11, it is likely that Thomas was then living with his widowed mother Mary.

With Henry Sparrow and Lucy Hanks duly married we are interested to learn if possible what kind of a home life was created for Nancy Hanks by her stepfather, Henry Sparrow. Nancy was apparently about six years old at the time of the wedding.

Henry and Lucy Sparrow began to rear a family which eventually consisted of four sons, James, Thomas, Henry, and George, and four daughters,

Elizabeth, Lucinda, Margaret, and Mary. Of the four sons reared in this home two of them became preachers, James, the first born, and Henry. Furthermore the daughters married pious men, and in the second generation of children there were several ministers. Up to this very day there continue to come from this religious group an unusually large number of ministers. The Reverend J. J. Whitehouse, who has been largely responsible for the discovery of the picture of the Reverend Henry Sparrow, is himself a clergyman and a direct descendant of the pioneer preacher.

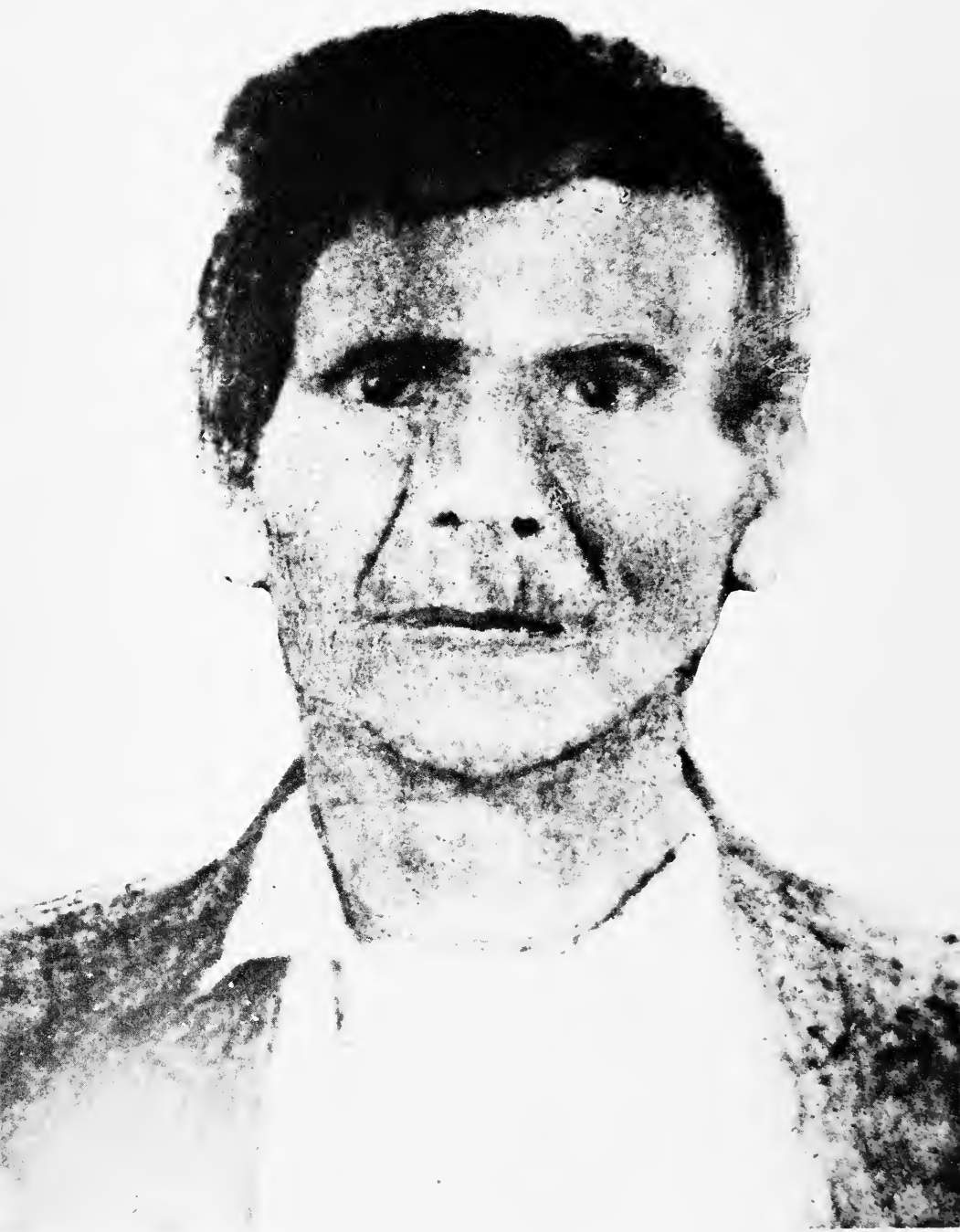
Lucy's husband, Henry Sparrow—a revolutionary soldier—received a pension during many years of his life, the last voucher coming from the government on September 17, 1840. He was seventy-six years of age when he passed away and his wife preceded him to the grave about the year 1825. They lived together as husband and wife for thirty-four years.

The community which grew up about the homes of the descendants of Henry Sparrow is noted for its piety, and in the very center of the Sparrow home sites is the Sparrow Union Church now called New Liberty. Here it was that his son, Reverend Henry Sparrow, labored a whole life time and as one of the parishoners put it, "He civilized the whole community." It is difficult to exaggerate the tremendous influence he exerted in Anderson County, Kentucky, during the years that he served as a minister there.

It is likely that the Reverend Henry Sparrow had learned the trade

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REVEREND HENRY SPARROW 1802-1881

HALF BROTHER OF NANCY HANKS LINCOLN

(REPRODUCTION OF AN OLD PENCIL DRAWING)

of chairmaker, as a record in the Franklin County Court House indicates he completed a contract for a large order of chairs. The bill appears as follows and apparently Henry Sparrow was obliged to sue Ashel F. Coil to collect for it.

"Account due Henry Sparrow by Ashel F. Coil.

To making 48 common chairs at \$2.50 per doz.	\$10.00
To making 94 slab chairs at \$3.50 per doz.	27.43
To making 16 sewing chairs at \$3.50 per doz.	4.67
To making 15 table chairs at \$4.50 per doz.	5.63
To making 6 slat back settees..	12.00
To making 4 arm chairs	4.00
12 days work at mansion house	12.00
Painting etc.	7.26
	<hr/>
	\$82.99

The old minister made his will on January 1, 1881, and it was probated on November 22 the same year. He names his widow, Ailcy, in the will and also his children: Sarah, wife of Prior Burge; Perlina, wife of Allen Snider; Elizabeth, wife of William R. Simpson; Mary, wife of John Whitehouse; Archy Sparrow; and Martha E, wife of Elijah Case. He also remembered in his will the children of his deceased daughters, Nancy and Delila. There is a possibility that his daughter Nancy may have been named for his half sister, Nancy Hanks, mother of the President.

We do not know how soon it was after their marriage that Nancy,

Lucy's child by her first husband, went to live with her Uncle Richard and Aunt Rachel Berry. They lived but a short distance away and she may have been going back and forth for several years before she finally made her home there; possibly it was not until after her Aunt Rachel became a widow in 1798. It is to be greatly regretted that the story of Nancy Hanks' girlhood so sympathetically, and with the exception of some confusion in names, so truthfully told by Mrs. Caroline Hitchcock, should be discredited and that a sordid story which begins with a bankrupt family in Mineral County, West Virginia, should be substituted for it.

The little information available about the Hankses has led to much idle gossip about the maternal ancestry of Abraham Lincoln. The only biographical fact that is positively known without any question of doubt is that Lincoln's mother's name was Nancy Hanks. A preponderance of evidence, however, seems to indicate that her mother's maiden name was Shipley. Beyond this statement one is dependent upon the testimony of those who have reported alleged conversations of the President or who have read the contradictory reports of various family groups. Inasmuch as this monograph has to do with the Sparrow family their version of the story will be presented.

Dr. William E. Barton claims that when he interviewed the Sparrow family in Anderson County, Kentucky, they had read few Lincoln books and knew nothing about the controversies concerning Lincoln's parentage. He further states that "As

soon as they are asked about their family connections, they tell their direct and consistent story: that they all know themselves to be related to Abraham Lincoln and they know how that relationship exists."

Dr. Barton further comments on his interviews with the Sparrow kinsfolk and states definitely how they believe the relationship to exist: "They all know that their great or great-great or great-great-great-great grandfather married Lucy Hanks and that she had a daughter, Nancy Hanks, but they have never heard that there was a scandal about it; they suppose that Lucy had been married before."

It would appear as if the descendants of Lucy Hanks would be as well informed about the history of their ancestors as some irresponsible informants who have picked up bits of campaign gossip here or there. Is it not time to allow the Sparrow family to have a word about the maternal grandmother of Abraham Lincoln, Lucy Shipley Hanks Sparrow, from whom they are descended?

Most biographers have paid more attention to Thomas and Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow than they have to Henry and Lucy Sparrow. Henry and Thomas were brothers but there is no documentary evidence that supports the theory that Elizabeth Sparrow and Lucy Sparrow were sisters. The will of Joseph Hanks which names Elizabeth as a daughter fails to name Lucy as a daughter although all the children are named according to a statement in the will.

Herndon claims that "Nancy Hanks, the mother of the President, at a very early age was taken from

her mother Lucy,—afterwards married to Henry Sparrow—and sent to live with her aunt and uncle, Thomas and Betsy Sparrow."

Thomas Sparrow and Elizabeth Hanks were married in Mercer County on October 17, 1796, about six years after the wedding of Henry Sparrow and Lucy Shipley Hanks. By this time Nancy, Lucy's child by her first marriage, was at least twelve years of age. Of course there could have been no Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow home until the time of the wedding in 1796 although there are biographers who continue to insist that Nancy as a very small child went to live with them.

There is evidence that Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow did live in Mercer County for a short time at least, but in 1798 Thomas Sparrow and his brother-in-law, Jesse Friend, joined in renting a tract of land in what was then Hardin County, and we usually think of them as citizens of Hardin County rather than of Mercer. It was in Hardin County that they acquired property and here also that they took into their home a Nancy Hanks, not the mother of the President but a sister of Elizabeth Hanks and her son Dennis Hanks. The presence of two Nancy Hankses has resulted in much confusion and has caused many erroneous statements to be made about the mother of the President by biographers who have paid little attention to historical accuracy.

There is little or no evidence to show that Nancy Hanks Lincoln ever lived with Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow who have been called her foster parents. When Thomas and

Nancy Lincoln moved to Elizabethtown shortly after marriage they were at least fifteen miles from the Thomas Sparrow home. For about two years, just before and just after Abraham Lincoln was born, Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln lived about a mile from the Sparrows but soon moved to a home about eight miles distant, remaining there until they migrated to Indiana.

There are those who may feel that Nancy's signature as a witness on the will of Thomas Sparrow would contribute to the reliability of the supposed relationship. If the Sparrows had reared Nancy Hanks Lincoln from childhood, as Herndon alleged, or if, as Lamon who used the Herndon manuscripts states, "they were the only parents she ever knew," the place to look for her name would be among the beneficiaries instead of among the witnesses to the will. The will has recently been discovered in Indiana and while Nancy Hanks Lincoln appears as a witness she is not mentioned in any bequest in the will which follows:

"October 9th, 1818—This twenty-first day of September in the year Eighteen Hundred and Eighteen Thomas Sparrow is in his perfect senses on this date above mentioned that all the goods and chattels that the above mentioned Thomas Sparrow has is to belong to his wife Elizabeth Sparrow so that she can do as she pleases with it until her death and after her death the whole of the property above mentioned is to fall to Dennis Hanks when he comes of age and that the above T. Sparrow has made choise of Thomas Carter to be his Executor for his

effects above written this from under my hand and seal.

"Thomas (X) Sparrow (his mark).

"Test: David Casebier, Nancy (X) Lincoln (her mark).

"Indiana State & County of Spencer, Sct."

Just one week after the will was made, on September 28, 1818, Thomas Carter made oath that he was "a by-stander and heard the same (the will) acknowledged." It is likely that it was on this day that Thomas Sparrow passed away. On October 5, 1818, just one week after the previous date, David Casebier, who had joined with Nancy Lincoln in witnessing the will, made oath that Thomas Sparrow was of sound mind when he made the will.

Between the dates of September 21 and October 5 Elizabeth Sparrow, wife of Thomas, passed away, all of which is in harmony with the general details of the family tradition.

There are affidavits in Hardin County, Kentucky, which grew out of the settlement of Thomas Sparrow's estate, which affirm that Thomas and his wife had no children of their own and that Dennis Hanks became the heir to their property. The newly discovered will supports this affidavit, as Dennis Hanks is named as the only beneficiary after the death of Mrs. Sparrow.

There is not sufficient information available to present a complete genealogical study of the Sparrow family, but possibly the list of marriages which are here presented will allow some of the members to work out a

dependable genealogy of the Sparrow clan in America.

In the list of marriage bonds which follow it must be remembered that the dates given are those on which the bonds were secured in the county courthouse mentioned after the date. The actual wedding usually took place two or three days later.

Archy and Sarah E. Wiatt

March 18, 1853—Anderson

B..... and John Davis

March 5, 1790—Mercer

Delila and Silas Franklin

January 14, 1859—Anderson

Dennis and Susanna Davis

February 11, 1804—Mercer

Elizabeth and George Davis

July 2, 1805—Mercer

Dennis and Sally Whitehouse

November 4, 1815—Mercer

Green B. and Nancy Sparrow

January 27, 1857—Anderson

Nancy and Richard Elhut

May 28, 1800—Nelson

Greenberry and Deborah Jane Edrinton

January 17, 1854—Anderson

Henry and Lucy Hanks

April 26, 1790—Mercer

Henry and Alcey Smith

February 12, 1822—Mercer

James and Nancy Hineman

August 28, 1818—Mercer

James and Synthia Medlock

March 5, 1840—Mercer

James B. and Sally Webb

February 3, 1821—Nelson

John and Martha Ann Hufmann

August 25, 1800—Anderson

John and Peggy Davis

May 28, 1824—Mercer

James and Parthema Vandermetre

August 12, 1850—Anderson

Malinda and John F. Richardson

January 11, 1858—Anderson

Mary and Conrad Franklin

February 22, 1812—Mercer

Peter and Rebecca Sparrow

August 8, 1798—Mercer

Peter and Milly Edwards

November 19, 1800—Mercer

Polly and Benjamin Whitehouse

July 9, 1808—Mercer

Rebecca and Curtis Bowman

July 23, 1824—Mercer

Sarah and John Crutcher

October 21, 1841—Anderson

Thomas and Elizabeth Hanks

April 17, 1796—Mercer

Thomas and Rebecca Bolling

August 6, 1798—Mercer

Thomas and Sally Smith

July 31, 1826—Mercer

Thomas and Mary Smith

April 11, 1836—Anderson

William and Mandy Jane Franklin

September 7, 1852—Anderson

William and Elizabeth Ingram

June 8, 1857—Anderson

Willie T. and Delila Jane Ashley

January 11, 1858—Anderson